



Project#9: People with Disabilities' Voices and Action in Social Accountability, 2019-2021

Project Objective:

Amplified voices of persons with disabilities for enhanced access to more equitable, quality public services in the target district.

Funding:

The Voice Programme of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, managed by Oxfam in Cambodia, funded the project with 156, 858 USD.

Implementing Partners:

Epic Arts

Target Areas:

Seven Communes in Tramkak District, Takeo Province

Project Outcomes:

- 1 Improved representation and opportunities for people with disabilities to be heard in all the new I-SAF stages.
- 2 Enhanced responsiveness to the voices and claims of people with disabilities.
- 3 The demands of people with disabilities lead to improvements in national I-SAF policy and practice.

The project has completed a snowball survey report in 2019, a documentation & learning workshop, it produced case studies, organised empowerment workshops for people with disabilities (one in each of the seven communes), as well as scorecard meetings with people with disabilities (one in each commune). The meetings produced a Joint Accountabilities Action Plan (JAAP) to improve services for people with disabilities, and the project has contributed to updated ISAF Operational Guideline, adopted and publicly presented in January 2021.



Activities and Results:

- 9.1 514 women, men and children with various disabilities and of different age groups were identified through a snowball survey in target communes (122% of our initial target). We mobilised 185 people with disabilities who participated in empowering workshops and citizens with disabilities scorecard meetings (88% of the target). At least 50% of the Community Accountability Facilitators in the target district were trained in making I-SAF disability-inclusive in the 7 target communes (100%).
- 9.2 **Persons with disabilities regularly attended monthly meetings of commune, health centres and primary schools in target communes.** Service providers were provided with equipment (wheelchairs, eye-glasses), ramps were built at public institutions, education materials and scholarships were offered to disabled children. Beneficiaries received training courses on animal husbandry techniques, and they were supplied with quality medicines. Health centre medical staff was supplemented and were thought to offer better services to persons with disabilities, and in general to all citizens.
- 9.3 **61 (50.4%) of the 121 issues raised by people with disabilities (PwDs) in the Joint Accountability Action Plans (JAAPs) in 7 communes were solved by local authorities** and service providers. They accepted people with disabilities' issues in the seven Join Accountability Action Plans, integrated them into the Commune Investment Plans for 2020 or in some cases designed action plans to be implemented in 2021.
- 9.4 **The Operational Guidelines for Phase II of Implementing the Social Accountability Framework (I-SAF) have been revised to integrate social and disability inclusion** under the technical support of API and World Vision Cambodia. There is now a clear set of minimum quality standards that all relevant implementing partners in ISAF will follow. Beyond these minimum standards, the guidelines introduce methods and actions that correspond to best practices and lessons learned from various organizations. The inclusiveness of I-SAF is also included in these guidelines. A policy dialogue on social inclusion was conducted with 25 participants representing ISAF policy level stakeholders, implementers, and disadvantaged target groups, focusing on improving the inclusiveness of the ISAF process. The Secretariat of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD-S) highly appreciated the new I-SAF Operational Guidelines and acknowledged that they improved the quality and diversity of participation in the local development process.



9.5 Documentation & learning reports have been produced, responding to the 6 learning questions we had asked. The project has shone light on the low level of participation of PwDs in the I-SAF processes and services, as well as on the lack of uptake by local decision-makers / service providers. A total of 49 citizens were interviewed for these reports, of whom 29 were persons with disabilities. The majority of respondents (85%) expressed interest in the I-SAF process. The supply side showcased a good level of understanding of disability inclusion, however this primarily took the form of a theoretical understanding and was not then applied to the services they were responsible for. Further, the innovative use of art to increase awareness of disability and the confidence of PwDs in the target provinces has proven successful. Disability focal points are key to ensuring ongoing community and organisational change towards disability inclusion. Guidelines for accessibility need to be created in order to address common barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Project good practices on disability inclusion in ISAF were shared with 240 (106 female) representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, national and sub-national authorities, CSO partners and community accountability facilitators. Participants contributed to improving the I-SAF operational guidelines by raising issues related to social & disability-inclusion during the National workshop ‘Budget for Effective, Inclusive and Equitable Social Accountability Development’, on 28 October 2020. The event also contributed to strengthening and expanding the communication and partnership between community accountability facilitators, CSOs, and relevant ministries. It also offered an opportunity for them to share the progress, challenges, and recommendations in order to improve the strategy to jointly implement ISAF in the second phase. The workshop was organised with the collaboration of API, Star Kampuchea, CDPP, CARE, NCDD, FHI360, World Vision Cambodia. Three case studies related to the project have been documented and shared using the Linking and Learning (L&L) platform of Oxfam Global. They feature: 1) A farmer demanding the right to access social services in the I-SAF process; 2) A school principal explaining how the results of the I-SAF process benefit children with disabilities by building ramps and separate toilets at the Thom Mongkul Primary School in the Nhaeng Nhong commune; and 3) A women with disabilities emphasising the need for social protection during the Covid19 pandemic, as well as the need for good governance through the implementation of the I-SAF project.

9.6 The internal evaluation found that the project had been able to amplify the voices of PwDs and put their concerns on the agenda of the local authorities. Specifically, the project has built up the confidence and has empowered PwDs to understand that they have the same dignity as anyone else and can make a valid contribution to society through the ISAF activities.



- 9.7 The quality of the project's disability inclusion proposals was high. The project's main recommendations were the use of ISAF activities specifically targeting PwDs (see discussion below) and the removal of barriers for PwDs to access ISAF activities (see discussion in Evaluation Objective 3). These points brought a two-pronged approach to integrating disability inclusion, firstly by creating a safe space for PwDs to raise their voice and secondly by aiming to remove barriers that stop PwDs from raising their voice.
- 9.8 The project was able to provide disability inclusion for PwDs, through the use of specific interface meetings and JAAPs for PwDs. In particular, the project employed an effective model that utilised two JAAPs, one for the general public and one for PwDs. This model however has not been implemented/integrated at the policy/ISAF framework level, therefore the positive benefits of these disability inclusion measures can only be seen in the project's target communes.
- 9.9 The project's main contribution to policy level change was its proposition to remove the barriers for PwDs to access ISAF activities. Notably the original ISAF project was not designed to take into account PwDs and had no elements of disability inclusion. Therefore, in this project, API worked closely with World Vision, CARE, FHI 360 and The National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) to revise the ISAF Operational Guidelines for NGO Partners and the ISAF training curriculum, so that the perspective of PwDs is included.
- 9.10 Improvements in ISAF that are required include integrating a minimum quality of standards for disability inclusion. Revisions suggested for the ISAF Operational Guidelines for NGO Partners aim to remove attitude barriers (PwDs facing discrimination, being ignored or misunderstood), physical access barriers (lack of proper ramps, chairs, hearing and visual aids, overly technical language) and transportation barriers (not being able to physically access services because they cannot use usual means of transportation such as motorbikes due to disability).
- 9.11 In the Tramkak district, PwDs had more opportunities to participate in ISAF activities (interface meetings/events) and have their opinion heard. This is in contrast to other ISAF areas, where PwDs were not specifically targeted, invited or empowered to participate in the activities, rather they were discriminated against and isolated. The project's work in the Tramkak district is a model for other ISAF activities in other districts.



- 9.12 The arts were a very powerful tool for building the confidence and empowering PwDs, and this was achieved through the workshops and performances organised by Epic Arts. These activities gave PwDs positive role models and examples of what PwD can achieve and contribute to, in their communities. The Epic Arts performances and workshops were an ideal tool for lobbying, empowering and raising awareness.
- 9.13 The Epic Arts performers are people living with disabilities, so they perform to express their issues and their personal experience. Whenever a real and personal story is shown, it is more effective and poignant and touches the audience's heart. Arts help us enjoy and also understand more deeply the social issues surrounding disability. Arts are a part of our lives and as humans, we live with arts every day as a source of creativity. For some people, arts are just an entertainment tool, but when we think more critically, we understand that the arts also function as a soft advocacy tool.
- 9.14 The internal evaluation provided the following recommendations: procedures for project partnership assessment; the involvement of district level authorities; API should continue to focus on disability inclusion; continue to use art-based advocacy; appropriate engagement by community volunteers; continue to use existing PwD community volunteers; promotion of PwD information sharing and networking opportunities; continue to promote Epic Arts PwD short videos

Lessons Learned:

- 9.15 New scorecard tools for people with disabilities must come in different forms depending on their disability status, otherwise they will have difficulties in the public service evaluation process. In addition, some people with disabilities need assistants to help them in the assessment, especially people who lost their arms or are blind.
- 9.16 Both staff and CAFs have transformed the barriers of the Covid-19 epidemic into technological performance enhancements. It's very useful to keep people in contact, it involves less budget spending, and it saves time previously consumed for travelling.



Challenges:

- 9.17 Covid-19 was a central issue during the reporting period, local authorities did not allow any public meetings.
- 9.18 Support for people with disabilities was needed in order to enable them to fully participate in social activities in the form of providing accompanying people, sign language interpreters, and other accessibility related services. Some PwDs were difficult to interact with in the the I-SAF process because of low education levels.
- 9.19 More time is needed to educate public authorities about disability and to include disability issues in local development plans.
- 9.20 Most people with disabilities do not have smartphones, so a lot of time is needed in order to familiarise them with online tools.
- 9.21 Due to the Covid19 outbreak, the requirement to notify police officers regarding gatherings or meetings is applied more strictly and notifications have to be given earlier.

The Way Forward:

- 9.22 The official dissemination of the new, improved ISAF Operational Guidelines will have to be undertaken for all ISAF stakeholders and implementing organisations.
- 9.23 Offer disability inclusion training to all API staff.
- 9.24 Undertake a project internal evaluation aimed to (a) assess the project's effectiveness, responding to the guiding questions highlighted in the proposal, (b) respond to the project's learning questions of the "Innovate and Learn" proposal, (c) Derive recommendations for API's and Epic Arts' future work in the areas of inclusive ISAF, inclusive local governance and / or disability-inclusion in our programmes.